

TWO FIFTEEN



**A**UCKLANDERS LOVE TO imagine leaving the car at home, having a simple but satisfying meal at their neighbourhood restaurant, then walking off the crème brûlée while feeling suitably chuffed at supporting the local economy. But in practice we're unlikely to follow through unless our local restaurant is both cheaper and just as good as what we can find further afield.

Jeremy Schmid knows this. The Lewisham-Award-winning chef, one-time star of TV2's *Hell's Kitchen* and the man behind Little Boys Sausages, has pitched his new Mt Eden restaurant, Two Fifteen, carefully at the middle of the market (all mains are under \$30), yet the food is outstanding. Sure, you'll find finer food elsewhere, but for simple bistro food you'll be hard-pressed to find better.

Schmid's team is sensational. With him in the kitchen are Jean Wan from Merediths and Malcolm Reeve from Dine, and out front is the charming maître d' Josephine Graham. Alongside Graham (though not always early in the week) is sommelier Cameron Douglas, one of just 167 wine experts worldwide to have been awarded a Master Sommelier title. Don't be intimidated — there's not a trace of pretentiousness about Douglas's style. Whether you ask him to play it safe or go for something outrageous, his wine matches are superb.

The menu reads like a lesson in plain English. Take, for example, "oxtail tartlet, veal liver, onion jam, port glaze". No extraneous descriptors, no frilly language, just what you can expect on your plate. And yet it never sounds dull. There are enough exciting ingredients to make those standards seem like just what you want to eat.

If what you feel like is a big, meaty comfort dish, you'll do very well at Two Fifteen. The rosemary, apricot and cardamom-spiced lamb shank with mashed potato is divine. The spices are subtle, never overpowering the lamb, and the meat is tender without completely falling apart. There's a great pork, fennel and cheese sausage dish on the menu (no surprises there) and an interesting variation on the classic cassoulet — grilled pork loin atop a white bean, rocket and chorizo compote with a star anise jus — though the pork was a little overdone the



TOP: SNAPPER WITH PRAWN-AND-HERB RISOTTO. ABOVE RIGHT: COFFEE BRÛLÉE WITH CINNAMON PUFFS.

night we visited.

There's not quite as much seafood on the menu, but the two dishes we tried were excellent. Fried squid is often a risky choice, but Two Fifteen's version, served with coriander aioli and a baby-leaf salad, was perfectly cooked and much tastier than most. But even better was the snapper served on a perfect prawn-and-herb risotto. For vegetarians, there are a couple of options, served either as an entrée or a main. We can recommend the hearty mushroom risotto.

A quirky entrée of soft tacos with confit duck and black-bean purée was not so successful — the spiced tomato sauce had an odd metallic tang to it.

From the dessert menu, the pear and black-berry crumble is just like your grandma's:

perfectly fine, but not exciting. We preferred the deliciously creamy coffee brûlée with cinnamon puffs drizzled in dark chocolate.

Two Fifteen's fit-out is a far cry from that of the building's previous tenant (Pho South Vietnam, one of *Metro's* Top 50 Asian restaurants, which has relocated to 8 Lorne St) but it's nothing thrilling. The blacked-out lower windows give it the hard-to-find quality of the French Cafe and Merediths (if you can't find it, it must be exclusive, right?) but inside it's just mushroom-coloured walls, shiny wooden floors, a few simple banquettes and bare tabletops.

But don't be put off by the bland interior. The food is excellent and, at a mere \$120 for two, incredible value for money.

AMY CAMERON

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**ADDRESS:** 215 Dominion Rd, Mt Eden, ph 630-6474.

**HOURS:** Lunch, Friday from noon; dinner, Tuesday to Sunday from 4pm.

**BILL:** Entrées \$14.50-\$16.50; mains \$23.50-\$29.50; desserts \$13.50.

**STAND-OUT DISH:** Snapper with prawn-and-herb risotto.

**NOISE:** Good bistro bustle, but quiet enough for easy conversation.

**CHEF:** Jeremy Schmid.